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Pride Matters

The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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The Inquirer is the oldest
Nonconformist religious newspaper

"To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition."

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches 2001*

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Inquiring Words

Golden Threads

We gather the golden threads of life and weave from them a rich tapestry:

the golden thread of common, everyday human life speckled with small, unidentifiable little decencies;

the golden thread of human pain and human pleasure from which together each human biography is writ;

the golden thread of vision and example set by known and unknown prophets, saviours and good samaritans;

the golden thread of communal sorrow and public despair transformed by Easter resurgence, Passover liberations and the resurrection of crucified human spirits;

the golden thread of broken promises mended, held slaves freed, captive people liberated, exiled friends returned;

the golden thread of hope and life which shines despite social cold, political darkness and autocratic power;

the golden thread of many-splendoured life – spider, human and lion, fish, plant and toad; the golden thread of human families when the generations sensitively appreciate their roles and times;

the golden thread of literature, art and music – Job, Beethoven, Hamlet, Renoir, Burns and 'Greek Thompson';

the golden thread of wonder, increased human understanding walking hand in hand with a greater sense of mystery;

the golden thread of human communities loyal to commanding and transforming visions of how things may be

O God, we thank you that in the texture of our common life, there shines forever this golden thread.

Amen

– Andrew M Hill



Carrying the banner for Unitarians at Manchester Pride are (l-r) Jeff Gould, Jane Barraclough, Danny Crosby and Bob Pounder. Peter Sampson (in scarf) walked behind -- as did Bella Italia's Oompa Loompas Photo by Joseph McGarraghy

Pride events need people of faith

Even though many Pride battles have been won, it is still essential that people of faith march, says **Jane Barraclough**

I get a bit mumbly and grumbly about walking in Pride, if truth be told. Last year in Manchester we had the pleasure of walking behind a group of heterosexual porn stars who crashed the parade – or so I was reliably informed afterwards.

That experience didn't put me in the sweetest mood.

This year we were sandwiched between the two amplified and conflicting musical experiences of Robin Hood, riding through the glen, provided by the Gay Rambling Association and the Oompa Loompas provided gratis by Bella Pasta incorporated.

There are no two ways about it, Pride has become very commercialised in recent years and much of the celebration constitutes a set of moving advertisements in search of the pink pound.

I'm not too good with crowds and get even huffer when I realise there are more gay people watching the march from Cross St, than there are marching behind our banner. Granted, many of them aren't Unitarian, fond as they are of us in our eccentric little ways, so why should they march beside us?

The phrase I heard a lot this year was 'Oh, I'm not much of a marcher...'

It's easy enough, in this country at least, to think that all the battles have been won. Civil partnership is on the law books, equal ops reign.

And the way I've tended to think about our participation in recent years, is that we are, what is called in the trade 'an equal ops employer.' We are the only mainstream denomination to employ openly gay people. For that reason, it's one of the very few occasions in the year I wear a clerical collar.

That was until I turned the corner into Deansgate this year and sensed that all was not well with the crowd. We had a new banner this year, rainbow-coloured with the slogan, 'Unitarians welcome all God's children.'

Suddenly people were pointing at our banner and across the street, 'Tell them, tell them.' The anger was palpable.

And looking where they were pointing, I suddenly realized what was up. It was the usual Christian hate brigade, out with their yellow placards with the usual quotations from Leviticus, all somehow proving the point that God hates gays.

They're usually on St Peter's Square, but the powers-that-be had moved them this year. And I don't think they've had permission to preach in the years I've been marching, certainly not with megaphones.

But Deansgate is narrow at that point and the street was jammed. There were no barriers and, perhaps most significantly from a personal point of view, I hadn't had time to brace myself.

I normally write these guys off, as a few misguided lunatics. It is easy enough to do. But, for some reason, this year I couldn't.

And I realised that it is very, very important that we march, for reasons that had never even crossed my mind before.

The only religious groups in the parade this year were the Quakers and us. And we were a small posse indeed.

And if we hadn't marched, the only religious witness – in front of thousands of people – would have been a message of hatred.

With each day that passes, it gets easier and easier for the Richard Dawkinses of this world to present all people of faith as toxic bigots who should be legally prevented from congregating anywhere – let alone in public.

So ultimately marching in Pride has nothing to do with who we are marching for and whether their rights have been won. It's about challenging that certain form of faith which is fundamentalist, legalistic and filled with hatred.

I am glad to report that full-blooded hatred is something that I rarely feel. I do quite a good number in basic irritation, for which I pray the good Lord may forgive me. But I don't gather all the power of my human will, put it behind my hatred and in the process, turn it into a dangerous and infectious ideology.

That, I do not do.

And on the whole, it is something that Unitarians collec-

(Continued on next page)

How do we counteract hatred?

(Continued from previous page)
tively do not do.

Being a card-carrying liberal type (with a small 'L'), I find myself trying to understand human hatred, even human evil – whatever that means. And theories about the current explosion in religious fundamentalism abound. That it may be a response to the liberal consensus – that people don't want to be told they are all the same. They want to be culturally and ethnically distinct, they want an identity.

In a time of moral relativism, they want easy rights and wrongs. And, above all, punishment for those who do wrong – in their own eyes at least.

Fundamentalism may be a response to secularism. It may simply be panic, 'No-one goes to church, who shall we blame? Let's blame the religious liberals in our own ranks.' This goes on a great deal in the Anglican church. In the face of an apparently insurmountable problem, we do love to have someone to blame.

But, perhaps, looking for a cause is futile and a waste of time. That would be the argument of the Buddha, who compared the human condition to a man with an arrow stuck in his eye. Asking where the arrow came from, and what it is made of, is beyond foolish. It is absurd.

The important question is how to counteract hatred. How to effect change. This question is central to all the world faiths. Judaism and, to a great extent, Islam went in for community building and relied on careful administration of the law, bearing in mind there was no distinction between religious and



Edinburgh Unitarians marching Pride Scotia 2010 in June were also represented on a banner with other liberal faith groups. Photo by Jill Cunningham

secular law in the early days of those religions.

Disregarding what Christianity may or may not have done through history, Jesus the man turned his back on the law as an effective instrument of change. Jesus was Jewish and remained within the Jewish tradition all his life. The one thing he wasn't, of course, was a Christian.

The words 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind'; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself,' are often quoted as if they were the words of Jesus but in fact, they are a summary of the Law as given by 'an expert on the Law.'

Jesus agrees with him but the lawyer persists wanting 'to justify himself', so he asks Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' Jesus' response is the parable of the Good Samaritan, which teaches that the outsider is your neighbour and that loving your neighbour involves no small risk – or expense, for that matter.

The Buddha taught that the root of hatred is our tendency to see reality in dual terms, black and white, good and evil, insiders and outsiders. And until we can overcome that habit – difficult in itself – we will continue to scapegoat one another as well as the stranger in our midst.

All this stuff about what the Bible says is more of a problem for the orthodox for whom the Bible is a foundational text.

Unitarians shamelessly edit and pick and choose the bits we like and leave the bits we don't. (Something everyone does by the way.) You could construct just about any ideology you wanted from the Bible if you tried hard enough.

But when we were marching Jeff Gould, minister at Bury, quoted the gospel of John to me and it moved me so I stuck it up in our window:

Jesus said: 'Whoever comes to me, I will never drive away.'

And in the original Greek, the word never is emphasized so that it actually should read:

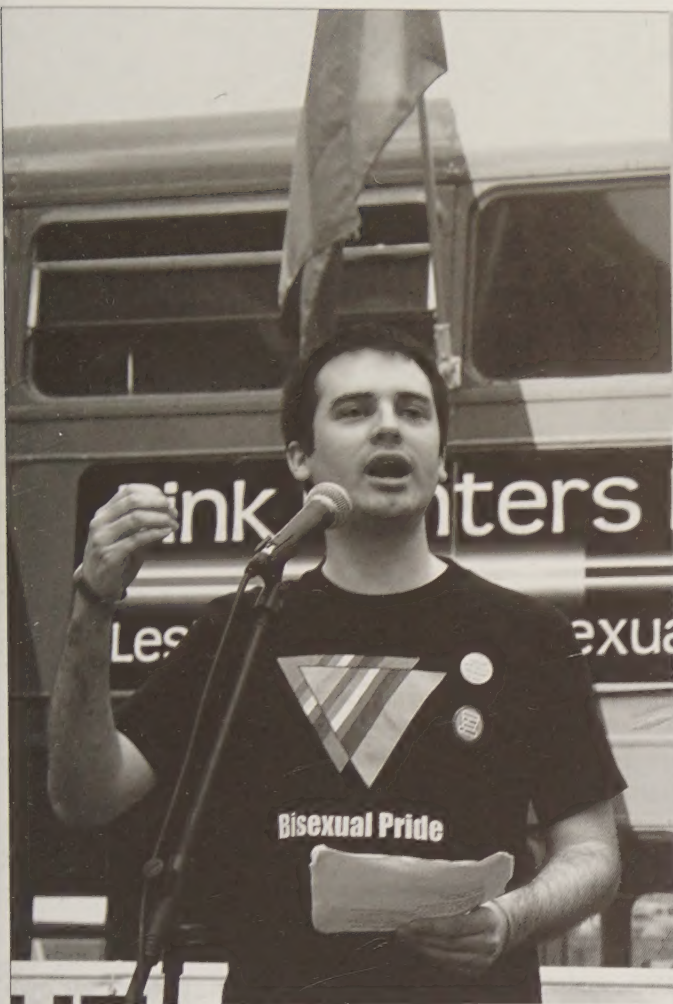
'Whoever comes to me, I will never, never drive away.'

The Rev Jane Barraclough is minister at Cross Street Chapel.



Nottingham Unitarians sponsored a stall at a pride event. Photo submitted by Zoe Bremer

Norwich Unitarians hosted Pride



Stephen Lingwood, minister at Bolton, addresses the crowd at Norwich Pride 2010. Photo by Andy Hornby

By MC Burns

More than 4000 people attended Norwich Pride 2010 – including 30 or so Unitarians marching behind the denomination's diversity banner. It was a fantastic day made even more special by the turn in the weather from heavy rain to sunshine just as the marched stepped off.

It was a great success for the Octagon Unitarian congregation. Stephen Lingwood, minister at Bolton, joined us for the day. He marched in the parade and spoke at the rally held afterward. Then, he conducted the Norwich Pride 2010 service at the Octagon. We flew a rainbow flag and, predictably, served coffee and tea after the service.

Publicity-wise, it was fantastic. The BBC did a story about Stephen and about the service. We had several other mentions in the local media. But the most important thing is that some people too often shunned or offered conditional acceptance by faith groups heard that the sacred belongs to them.

The religious service held to mark Norwich Pride in 2009 was held at a rather traditional Anglican church – one which opposes women clergy and bishops. Six people turned up – including Kate McKenna and Rowan Plath, members of the Octagon Chapel. They wondered if the Octagon might be a better fit and gained approval from the Pride Collective to go ahead with plans.

Stephen agreed to come and we got busy with publicity. A

'Our lives and relationships and bodies are no less holy than any body else's. We are human beings, part of the beauty of diversity in this world, we are proud to be who we are.'

– Stephen Lingwood

few weeks before the event, I did an interview with Stephen, about why he wanted to do the service and why it is important for faith groups to be involved in Pride events. I attached the interview to a press release about the service and sent it out to the local media. I also sent it to the Pride Collective and they posted it on their web site.

Then, I got an email from the organiser of Norwich Pride. She was so touched by what Stephen had to say that she wanted him to speak at the rally planned for after the march. Michelle Savage wrote: 'I'm wondering if Stephen would like to say a few words on the main stage on Millennium Plain? It would have to be quite short – no more than two minutes – because the show is packed but I love the things he's said in the press release and I think they would have a powerful impact on the crowd.'

Stephen agreed. He told the crowd: 'People sometimes ask if we still need Pride festivals. After all, we have made so much progress in creating equality and freedom from discrimination in this country. And that's true. But we still live in a society that is deeply heterosexist and homophobic, and biphobic and transphobic. As gay, lesbian, bi and trans people we are still taught, in subtle and unsubtle ways, that our lives and our relationships are subnormal. We are still taught, every day, that our lives and our relationships are less holy. We are still taught, every day, to feel ashamed. Well today we give a simple message: we are not ashamed. We are proud. We have nothing to be ashamed about.'

Michelle was right. It was an electric moment when Stephen spoke.

We also did a leaflet to distribute during the march. We included information about our congregation on one side and about Unitarianism on the other. We prominently featured the Norwich Pride logo so that most people (with the exception of the so-called Christians who came to protest) were happy to take them.

Attendance at the Pride service was more than three times what it was last year. It was fantastic. And, on the Sunday following the Pride festivities, three new people turned up in the pews – all attracted by the positive messages we put out during Pride. A few more have come along since then. The leaflet we distributed gave people a good idea of what we're about. So, even if they preferred celebrating Pride in the pub instead of a pew that day, they learnt our door is always open.

MC Burns is a member of the Octagon Chapel, Norwich.

Unitarian movement mak

By Derek McAuley

Modern-day Unitarians in Britain have been reluctant to promote their faith, possibly for fear of being seen to proselytise. With falling numbers and a real danger that more congregations will close there is an increasing desire for growth. Without growth, we will die. This is one way to look at it.

Another is to argue that, actually, people will truly gain from finding us. By keeping our light 'hidden under a bushel' we are depriving them of something that is not only intrinsically good but that they actually need. Indeed, the Rev Peter Morales, president of the Unitarian Universalist Association, has argued that growth is a moral and religious imperative not just simply organisationally desirable. As he said 'Our congregations are surrounded by the spiritually hungry and religiously homeless. Growing our movement is the moral equivalent of feeding the hungry and housing the homeless'.

The General Assembly Executive Committee Growth Team decided to test this proposition at its workshop at the Annual Meetings in Nottingham. We reasoned that by asking a simple question; 'What difference has Unitarianism made to your life?' we might gain some insight into the benefits that individuals may gain by coming into contact with us, joining our movement and therefore contribute to our growth. More than 75 responses were received at the gathering.

What people said was powerful and inspiring. Do not underestimate the impact of our work in local congregations across Great Britain. Peoples' lives are changed through their involvement with us.

The replies may not come as a surprise to some. I certainly know from my own experience the difference finding Unitarianism has made. They conform to how we see ourselves at our best but to see it put down so simply should make us all sit up, ponder together and take action.

So what about the replies?

The words 'community' and 'home' are very significant for many respondents. Our local congregations offer opportunities to make friends who will provide support and love in a spiritual context. A place to be an individual yet also to belong.

'It has inspired me throughout my life by providing a loving and caring community with a philosophy and values with which I am completely at one'

'Given me a supportive community in which I can be me and look for answers to questions and an inner strength to sustain through life.'

'I made deeper and long-lasting connections with new friends – my congregation is like a second family. I feel the support and inspiration of my congregation has drawn out my personal potential'

The phrase 'spiritual home' appeared several times with some having a feeling of 'coming home'; of finding somewhere that is secure and nourishing spiritually and emotionally.

'I just felt as though I had come home; I found what I was looking for'

'Unitarianism has made me feel cared for, unique and useful. It is a reason to get up in the morning. I feel comfortable and more confident being among like minded people, sharing our spiritual journeys together.'

For a small group, of course, this is something they have



Some Unitarians said being part of the movement helped them with life's questions. Photo by James Barry

always had; those who were born Unitarians. A few talked of five, six and even seven generations of Unitarianism. They could not remember not being a Unitarian or imagine how life might have been different.

'Being a Unitarian allows me to form my own opinions within a loving, questioning community without feeling 'strange'. Allows me to explore my inner divine'.

'As my life experiences and understanding have developed so has Unitarianism, providing both comfort and challenge, as well as a greater vision to which I have committed my life.'

The other major theme relates to the freedom that Unitarianism offers to each individual to explore their own spirituality and to grow in so many ways. We should not take this freedom for granted; it is much appreciated and valued.

'Allowed me to have free thought of how my life should be led and how I can help others'.

'It has meant I have the personal liberty to ask questions, change and develop my ideas concerning religion and the elements and worth that matter in life'

'I can breathe again.

I can have my lifelong enquiring lovingly supported.

I can contribute my questions not hide my uncertainty and misgivings.

I can be all that.

I can be – and stay with the questions.

I can stay in enquiry with myself, with others and all life – and be valued for doing so.'

Yet what is also important is that this spiritual exploration is undertaken within a Unitarian community. Words like 'openness', 'open' and 'opening up' were mentioned as attributes of our congregations. We provide the space which enables exposure to a range of spiritual experiences and to other truths and wisdom. The opportunities for religious education in its widest sense – both in a formal setting and in talking with others – are valued.

'Helped me find coherent answers to some of the vague, unformed questions that have bugged me since childhood'

'It consistently brings me back to the simplest,

a difference



Participating with a Unitarian congregation helped some respondents feel they are part of a family-like community.
Photo by James Barry

truest, most liberal way of approaching the spiritual questions in life. No other value group has the same ability to enrich'.

Make no mistake about it, for some, Unitarianism is personally transforming. It is a way of life not simply a 'Belief'. People may change in how they understand themselves, the world and indeed God. It will lead to a concern for the wider world and practical action.

'It has given my life a purpose I never knew could exist – and I want to share this as widely as possible. Helped us to be at peace with ourselves.'

'Unitarianism provides a central focus for my life, a central purpose which guides all my thinking and a religious philosophy that is free, authentic and life affirming. This is a spiritual adventure'.

'Unitarianism changed my life immensely'.

'It is a place where I have grown into myself (and keep growing)'.

'The courage to 'come out' as a person of faith and the ability to talk about that coherently'.

'Being an active part of a faith which offers a positive contribution for humanity's spiritual quest'.

'Find my best self, work for justice, value humanity, have a better life'.

Of course, you could argue that this is a skewed sample and that the attendees at the GA are not representative of the movement as a whole. This was not a scientific study but I would say that it is an impressionistic snapshot – and that in describing their experiences we are also to some extent 'representing' those of others.

If you are like me, this is all a bit overwhelming. Can we really have this effect on people? Well, yes. These are the voices of real, live British Unitarians in the first decade of the 21st century. They make a strong statement about what we have to offer. Finding a Unitarian community can make a big difference. Would it not be churlish not to tell others about it? If we do and we offer the opportunities for community and exploration people seek we will most certainly get the growth in numbers we desire.

Derek McAuley is Chief Officer of the General Assembly.

Remembering Sir Cyril Smith MBE

The life of one of our most colourful and famous Unitarians was celebrated at a packed funeral service at Rochdale Town Hall on 13 September 2010.

Cyril Smith who died on 3 September has been described as a larger-than-life figure. He was the Liberal and Lib Dem Member of Parliament for Rochdale from 1972 to 1992 and was regularly in the news for his forthright statements and his refusal to accept the state's inbuilt bureaucracy. He was a true Unitarian.

Cyril had been Mayor of Rochdale and was greatly loved by the citizens of the town.

The Rev Gillian Peel, minister of Rochdale Unitarian Church conducted the service with dignity and compassion lighting the chalice at the commencement of the service as "the symbol of Unitarianism". The Rochdale Unitarian Church banner was prominently displayed on the platform which was occupied by Chris Davies the Lib Dem MEP for the North West, Lord David Alton a close political friend of Cyril, an Anglican canon, a Roman Catholic priest and soloist Freda Farnworth.

They each made a contribution, with the latter giving a spirited rendering of "My Way" at the close of the service to appropriately reflect Cyril's outlook on life.

Cyril had pre-arranged his own funeral service which included the opening hymn – *Lord of the Wondrous Earth*. It was good to hear the huge congregation singing the words to this Unitarian hymn with such gusto!

Condolences were offered by Gillian to Cyril's brother Norman and Norman's wife Shirley and his wider family. Cyril's nephew Craig Smith gave a formal tribute to his uncle which reflected that great sense of humour that so endeared Cyril to all whose lives he touched.

There was a goodly contingent of Unitarians present from all over the country together with many Liberal Democrat MPs and Lords including Simon Hughes the deputy leader. Lord Alan Beith who sat next to me during the service was very complimentary about Unitarians and marvelled at the quality of our fine buildings.

The service was followed by a private cremation, held locally.

Finally about 150 people sat down to a meal of pie and peas – a 'reet good do', as Cyril would have said.

– Neville Kenyon



The Rev Gillian Peel conducted the funeral service for Sir Cyril Smith MBE

Two new Unitarian blogs launched

By Louise Rogers

A blog (a contraction of the term "web log") is a type of website, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog)

I never thought that I would become a blogger. I am a fan of most things electronic and adore the Internet. I also like to write. But somehow a blog seemed a little self-indulgent. Whilst reading one of the magazines that I periodically buy about writing, I was taken with the suggestion that people started to write a blog. 'Great idea!' I thought – much easier than writing the 'great-novel-that-we-all-have-waiting-inside-ourselves' – but what should I write about? I had recently sketched out a couple of ideas for books: one on governance and local faith communities and one on community development for faith communities – so the decision was made quite easily and this is how I came to be writing two blogs rather than one.

It is easy to explain why I started with governance – it's what I do for work: I support voluntary organisations to develop their governance, systems and processes. I am very aware that what charities are supposed to do and what they actually do can be quite different – so what is 'good enough?' I also had a lot of material as I had written a 'How to set up a charity' guide for an organisation I worked for.

The community development idea emerged from my thinking around growth and my response to what seemed to be a marketing approach being taken by some. I wanted to add a different voice. I wanted to see if lessons could be learnt from community development thinking. I have worked with a variety of communities – from disadvantaged communities to those communities of shared experience such as profoundly deaf people and those with mental health needs. I also wanted to see if I could use ideas from psychology on individual development to draw some parallels with the development of a body of people.

One of the joys of writing a blog is that you have to write, I try to write something every week – it is a good discipline. The seeming drawback is that it is like thinking out loud – only the whole world could potentially be listening, which thankfully they are not. I am actually having fun and developing my ideas as I go. I might even get a book or two out of my blog posts.

Two 'Free samples'



Louise Rogers

How strong are our communities?

How do you measure how strong (not how large) our faith communities are? Humour me – I know that people think that there are some things which aren't measurable but I think most things can be evidenced if not measured even if that is taking a photo or asking a simple question or often by just observing. I have been moved to think about this when eavesdropping on some conversations and reflecting on what has happened – I will only reflect on 2010 but these sorts of things have been going on for years. K has been out walking with V and her new dog. K takes her daughter too – people getting to know

each other know and share their love of animals. For our walks (we have had four since January) ending up at people's houses where the inhabitant has catered for many hungry walkers – inviting people into their personal space and having their homes on show. A newish member B had a significant birthday and a surprise party to which we were invited – she was thrilled. Another B, J and others bring in plants, flowers and vegetables for people – I have something growing in my garden which has come from someone else's. D sends flowers and cards to people for their birthdays and special occasions from us all – but she and her husband pay for these. I have occasionally been surprised when we've been thanked for some flowers when I have been unaware that we have sent any. Three women have decided to take off to distant shores and are having a great time planning this together – two of the women are relative newcomers. We share genuine friendship and this is made real by the many little kindnesses and the connections within the bigger whole. The network which is our community is strong at each link. Can you manufacture this? Can you encourage this? One way surely is to spend time together – our monthly lunches and monthly walks (plus harder walks for the fit ones including our minister) are times when individual friendships are forged and they take on a life outside of the larger community. So I think that the strength of communities can be measured, although I suspect we would not want to do it. But we could measure how many times people text, phone, write, email each other. How many cups of tea are shared with a fellow traveller? How many birthday cards and greetings we get from each other? How many holidays are shared? We could measure it but perhaps just evidencing it with conversation, photos and blogs is enough.

From: <http://dev-spiritual-community.blogspot.com/> or <http://bit.ly/cmARAR>

'We're not a business'

I have heard this from fellow Unitarians and from people who work and volunteer for other charities and community groups. There are clearly rules for charities including our faith communities. We must follow these. And then there is good practice – which we can choose to follow or not. But there are insights to be gained, for example, understanding how businesses behave just as there are insights to be gained from psychology as to how individuals behave. We do not become psychologists by learning from psychology so we don't become business people by learning from business methods. Whilst some of the information available comes from business

(Continued on next page)

Unitarian blogs

For links to more Unitarian blogs (and lots of other wonderful information on communications and web applications) visit the General Assembly's Communications Commission blog at : <http://bit.ly/boLehg> or <http://unitariancommunications.blogspot.com/>.

An aggregator of British Unitarian blogs, set up by Yvonne Aburrow, can be found at: <http://unitariancommunications.blogspot.com/p/blogs.html> or <http://bit.ly/dffYGZ>

Kingswood Kids Club takes over!

By Ant Howe

Kingswood's Sunday School (known as the kid's club) recently celebrated their last session before their summer break by conducting the entire Sunday Service themselves. Preparations had been going on for some weeks and the congregation had been politely but firmly told that it was all 'Top Secret'!

When it came to the day, the Kid's Club presented a service that would be the envy of any lay preacher or minister.

The kids did everything from welcome people as they arrived, to taking the collection, to announcing the hymns.

Two members of the club sang solos and all the members joined in a sketch that explained the meaning of our congregational covenant. Prayers, readings and music also combined to create one of the most celebrative and lively services the congregation could remember.

Sunday Club leader Kirsty Bowie (along with her small band of helpers) has been an inspiration both to the kids and to the congregation. During the service she shared with us her motivation for working with young people. As someone who made the decision not to be a mother herself, how did she end up teaching full time, doing voluntary work with autistic children AND running a Sunday School? An emotional Kirsty



Kingswood Sunday Club members led prayers.



One youngster did the sermon at the Sunday Club service held at Kingswood.

shared Charles Causley's poem 'Timothy Winters' with us which she said has inspired her in her work. One verse reads:

Timothy Winters has bloody feet

And he lives in a house on Suez Street,

He sleeps in a sack on the kitchen floor

And they say there aren't boys like him anymore.

For the poem in its entirety go online to: <http://bit.ly/1bqbEZ> or <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/single-Poem.do?poemId=124>

Kirsty said she has come across many 'Timothys' and feels that as a church we are well-placed to help children understand themselves and their world better.

Kingswood's Chairperson John Chandler thanked the Sunday Club on behalf of the congregation for leading us in worship so wonderfully. The service ended with sustained applause, and with just a little sadness that it would be 6 weeks before the club would meet again.

The congregation retired to the hall for lunch and tucked into a meal of sandwiches, jelly, cake, and sweets!

The Rev Ant Howe is minister at Kingswood and Warwick.

Unitarian blogs on relationships and governance

(Continued from previous page)

sources, much comes from a more general study of organisations whatever those organisations do. The question to ask is always, 'how helpful might this be?' and not, 'where does it come from?' I also have a very big bee in my bonnet about efficiency. Efficiency is not about rigid structures (indeed some of the most efficient organisations have very few formal structures), it is not about the bottom line (i.e. money) and it is not about emotionless process. Efficiency is about getting something done with the least effort without sacrificing quality. Efficiency also means that things get done rather than not done, and they get done the right number of times. Just simple examples – flower rotas, milk rotas and cleaning rotas – ensure that the thing gets done (always have a contingency plan like some dried flowers, some long-life milk and an eye that misses the dust) and they get done the right number of times. For example, they avoid two people bringing the flowers, having three bottles of milk when you

only need one, or people polishing the hymnbooks because everything else has been cleaned three times. These examples are reflective of broader issues of efficiency with for example finances, meetings or developing the organisation. Some people are fantastic at developing processes and procedures and some aren't. If you have someone like that, cherish them and set them to work helping you (that is working with others and not for them) to make the most of what you have. Less time spent on inefficient activity means more time to do something else. I believe efficiency is a spiritual imperative – our time, our skills and our resources are finite and I believe that we are bound to make the best of what we have been given.

From: <http://governance4unitarians.blogspot.com/> or <http://bit.ly/cfpXb4>

Louise Rogers is a member of the Newcastle-Under-Lyme congregation.

Letters to the Editor

Response to letters about upcoming election

To the Editor:

Re the letters about the Executive Committee election in the 18 September *Inquirer*:

Firstly, the reason why three people can determine the system used and everything else to do with conducting the election is that Rule 7 of the GA constitution gives the Electoral Panel the authority to run the election. Secondly, the present Electoral Panel has gone for a First Past the Post (FPP) system (strictly speaking the system we have chosen is Multiple Non-transferable Vote – MNTV, as there are four places to be filled) because it is a simple and straightforward method where every vote has equal value and every vote is counted. That's what we meant by transparent. It is a system recommended when voting for individuals rather than representatives of a group. It is also a method with which most people are familiar, being used, at the present time, for national and local elections. Our thinking was, the more familiar voters are with the system the more likely they are to vote. And we do want to encourage more people to vote.

In a proportional system individuals are elected by a 'quota' system or share of the vote determined by the size of the electorate. Popular candidates, in a small constituency such as ours, will soon arrive at the quota and all other votes for them will be disregarded and the later choices of voters will be used. Voters do not know whether this will happen to their votes or not, even though they may have spent considerable time deciding who should be their first choices. With MNTV they know that their first 4 choices will count, even if the candidates they voted for do not win.

The budget for this election is £5500 including the cost of the independent supervisor and postage, but not the cost of Essex Hall staff time and, of course, not the time of the volunteer panel. Travel and other reasonable expenses are available to the panel.

I think Peter Whitham must have forgotten how strong the 'one-member-one-vote' lobby was at the first election. Indeed, that was the main

reason why associate members were given the choice of voting with papers provided by their congregation, if they belong to one, or receiving their voting paper individually. That choice will be available to them in this election too. The panel realises that this creates an anomaly since associate members may not vote at the GA Annual Meeting. However, it is beyond the brief of the panel to change this. Perhaps the Executive Committee might give this issue some thought before the next election.

Much as we might like the voting carried out within congregations because we are a 'GA of Congregations', the time has not yet come when it is feasible to rely on the commitment and organisation of all congregations to be sure that the process would be carried out effectively.

Finally, a review before the next election is very likely, especially in relation to the cost of the process. It would be beneficial if, as the previous Electoral Panel suggested, the panel is appointed before the GA Meetings prior to an election, so that a consultation with the panel may be held at those meetings. Unfortunately, the appointment was not able to be made in time this year.

Dawn Buckle

On behalf of the Electoral Panel

National movement should adopt a cause

To the Editor:

Our sermon last week was about faith and action, based on verses from James in the New Testament – 'faith without deeds, and deeds without faith, is lifeless'.

Unitarians have prided themselves on being social activists, arising from our belief that there is something of God, or the divine, in everyone. But we tend to give encouragement to individuals; we don't often do things on a congregational basis and rarely do something in the public arena countrywide.

But one such action has just come to fruition – the battle against the law of blasphemy. It has taken 200 years! It was finally wiped off the statute book in 2008. We have also encouraged action about the laws against

homosexuality; with the law in place, its implementation and development continues.

So I think it is time we looked to see if there is something else in the public arena that we could advance, as a denomination, based on our strap line of freedom, tolerance and reason. At a meeting following the service, three areas were suggested – faith schools, equality for all women, and the gap between rich and poor.

I wondered if other people have other ideas. My personal feeling is that if this is to be embraced by the overwhelming majority of Unitarians, it has to be something basic, perhaps a change in the law like both of the examples, and simple, (though probably not simple to promote). Any ideas via the editor please.

I also think that we need to do something more immediate – what about faith schools? We have passed several resolutions about these in past years; they are now likely to arise in ever greater numbers via 'free' schools – and all being paid for by the state. We have a distinctive standpoint – and being small is no excuse.

Rosemary Ruston

Watford Fellowship

Don't burn books, set them aside

To the Editor:

Burning.....

The age old tradition of burning things has been brought to our attention by the threatened actions of the so-called Florida pastor Terry Jones to burn Qur'ans.

A few years ago, I read the bestseller *The Labyrinth* by Kate Mosse. It brought to my attention The Cathars, an 11th century Christian group who were wiped out by what was called the Albigensian crusade. This was a religious crusade 'preached' by Pope Innocent III to exterminate 'the heretics'.

A week ago, I returned from a trip to the land of The Cathars, which is in the Languedoc region of France. I made the journey as I wanted to acknowledge the existence of these people and in some 'strange' way connect with them. Burning books was a feature of medieval life and not only were Cathar

(Continued on next page)

Christian Aid chief visits Essex Hall

'Your development agency' was how Loretta Minghella, the new Director of Christian Aid, described her organisation when she recently met General Assembly Chief Officer, Derek McAuley at Essex Hall. Loretta has been meeting the 41 churches, of which one is the General Assembly, who are the 'sponsoring bodies' of Christian Aid.

Christian Aid is active in more than 48 countries and has a £100 million budget. Loretta emphasised that they worked according to a partnership model and in co-operating with a range of local organisations 'walked with' local people for mutual transformation. Christian Aid has an ambitious vision of ending poverty – not simply reducing it!

Loretta is a lawyer by training who, after practising as a criminal litigator, began a career in financial regulation in 1990. The first Head of Enforcement Law, Policy and International Co-operation for the Financial Services Authority, she also chaired the International Organisation of Securities Commissions' Standing Committee on Enforcement and Information-Sharing.

In 2004, Loretta became Chief Executive of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, in which capacity she oversaw the payment of over £21 billion in compensation to victims of bank and other financial failures. A career change took her to Christian Aid in April 2010.

She highlighted the important role of the churches in Great Britain and Ireland in developing global partnerships and the opportunities for Unitarians to become more involved in their work. Currently Unitarian headquarters is active in circulating



Loretta Minghella and Unitarian Chief Officer Derek McAuley with the Christian Aid report 'Theology and International Development'.

ing material about Christian Aid week and various campaigns. Local congregations engage with Christian Aid to varying degrees.

Christian Aid grounds its compassionate action within a coherent theological framework and has recently published a report 'Theology and International Development'. This report looks at our understanding of poverty and human rights and then presents some aspects of relational theology to demonstrate that the major issues of development, such as HIV and AIDS, climate change, taxation and the food crisis can be formulated in terms of broken relationships. The report, and other theological material, is to be found on the Christian Aid website www.christianaid.org.uk/resources/churches/theology/index.aspx

Derek said 'I was pleased to welcome Loretta to Unitarian Headquarters. We are both fairly new in our jobs and it was good to share some of our early experiences. I described to her the work of Unitarians from Britain in supporting development projects in India and East Africa. Building up connections is central to our work and a greater awareness of each other is the first step'.



Letter

(Continued from previous page)
texts burned but the Bon Chretiens, to give them the name by which they were known, were placed on pyres. When we start burning books of the people we despise we may in time burn them with their books. In my own mind, what Terry Jones threatened to do and then withdrew was a political stance rather than a Christian stance against Islam. No doubt he justified what he planned, believing he was called by God to do it. That, he has in common with countless people over history who have claimed God for their own objectives – including the people who flew the planes on September 11th 2001.

Concerning burning books, it is curious to see how much passion that arouses. God, if you believe, does not need defending nor will burning material books diminish God. In one sense, maybe we should put all our books to one side and start again. I believe that this force we give the name God is more interested in a living, real time experience with humans rather than being bound to words. I love books. They can give us much but they can't give us the experience. That, we have to do for ourselves.
Gordon Jackson
London Colney

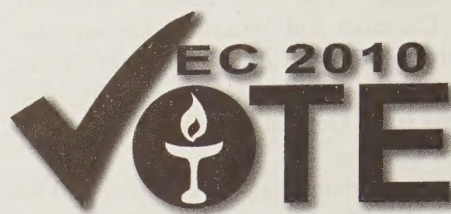
Inquirer letters policy

Letters should be succinct. It is preferable that they are sent by email to inquirer@btinternet.com. Typewritten or legible handwritten submissions may be sent to the editor at 46A Newmarket Road, Cringleford, Norwich NR4 6UF. Letters should be signed with the writer's full name and, if applicable, the name of the group or congregation with which the writer is affiliated. A postal address and telephone number are required, for verification purposes. Letters will be edited for length and content and may appear in an excerpted form. Any affiliations listed with letter writers' names are for identification purposes only, and should not suggest the view expressed is representative of that body.



Having just enjoyed an amusing and uplifting address from their President, Feargus O'Connor (half hidden, centre back) on the wit and wisdom of Mark Twain and Bernard Shaw, members of the Ministerial Fellowship at their September conference are emerging from a service in the Old Chapel at Great Hucklow. Among the speakers at this annual event were Linda Phillips, recently appointed GA Director of Ministry, (front, centre) and Derek McAuley, GA Chief Officer. The photograph was taken by Fred Muir, from Maryland USA, member of the executive committee of the equivalent ministerial body in north America, who addressed the conference on the importance of ministerial collegiality.

Election Reminder



The period for submitting nominations for election to the GA Executive Committee opened on Monday 20 September. Members wishing

to nominate themselves should contact Popularis Ltd, 6 De Montfort Mews, Leicester LE1 7EU; Tel: 0116 254 2259; Email: annehock@popularis.org.

For guidelines for submitting nominations and, the skills and knowledge required, please see the GA website. Secretaries of congregations and districts also have copies.

The nomination period lasts until Monday 18 October by which date nomination forms must be returned by post or email to Popularis Ltd.

The Election Panel: Dawn Buckle, Mike Tomlin, Eileen Wield

Book sale at Cross Street

Please come along and spend a lot of money at a book sale to be held at Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester on Saturday 23 October from 9 am. All funds raised will go to Voluntary Service Overseas. Also, donations of hardbacks and paperbacks are very welcome. For information, contact David Grundy on 0161 8772911. Or e-mail dgone@boltblue.com

AUTUMN EDITION OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN HERALD IS NOW OUT!

In this edition:

Why sacraments could save us: Bill Darlison draws on his Dublin experiences to warn that unless we rediscover symbolic worship, our chapels could soon become carpet warehouses. In his 14 years as Minister in Dublin, the Unitarian congregation there grew from 37 members to over 200 -- to become our largest in the British Isles.

Seeing Jesus through non-Roman eyes: Ruth Rowntree examines three manuscripts on early Christianity which have come to light in the last 100 years -- from Taoist Christianity, Buddhism and The Gospel of Thomas -- which offer radically-different perspectives on early Christian practice.

Awakening the heart's core: Tom McCready focuses on new insights offered by The Gospel of Thomas.

Also:

Linda Hart on Dreams and Parables

Jim Robinson and Yvonne Aburrow on Tenebrae services

Jim Corrigan on What do Unitarians believe?

Plus:

Report on UCA Summer Meeting at Golders Green Unitarians.

Upcoming events ... details of the 2010 Lance Garrard Lecture; and of workshops on how to lead Taizé services (led by Jeff Gould and Catherine Fozard) and on bringing sacraments into our worship (led by Bill Darlison).

The Herald is published twice a year by the Unitarian Christian Association.

Subscriptions or individual copies of the Herald are available. Please contact UCA treasurer Catherine Fozard, 20 Handforth Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 2LU. Phone: 01625 533110.

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